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'The people need to be enlightened and taught'[1]: Revolution and popular education

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Abstract

This article explores the social, educational, and participatory practices during the revolutionary period in Portugal (1974-1976), a historical moment marked by a combination of political rupture and grassroots mobilisation. By focusing on four key initiatives – agrarian reform, popular education, the MFA's Cultural Dynamization and Civic Action Campaign, and the Student Civic Service – this study sheds light on the diversity of popular educational experiences and social transformation movements of the time. It analyses how education and civic engagement were conceived and employed as tools for societal transformation. The results show that, during the revolutionary period, civil society, previously repressed under the dictatorship, played a crucial role in the democratisation of education. They also highlight the significant contribution of the popular classes and of popular education in the broader transformation of Portuguese society.

Keywords: Portuguese revolutionary process, agrarian reform, popular education, MFA's Cultural Dynamization and Civic Action Campaign, Student Civic Service

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Introduction

On April 25, 1974, the Carnation Revolution (*Revolução dos Cravos*) took place in Portugal. A group of military officers, dissatisfied with the political regime, particularly due to the prolonged colonial war (Judt, 2005; Rosas, 2020), marched on Lisbon and seized power, bringing an end to 48 years of dictatorship. The Carnation Revolution marked the collapse of the conservative and authoritarian Estado Novo (1933-1974), and the beginning of a revolutionary process known as Ongoing Revolutionary Process (*Processo Revolucionário em Curso – PREC)*.

It was a unique period in Portuguese history marked by widespread political participation of the population, particularly among the urban working and middle class, as well as the rural proletariat in the south of the country, and intense social mobilisation (Stoer, 1986), which gave rise to what Hammond (1988) refers to as a *popular power model* of revolution, one in which people were genuinely empowered through their active engagement in the popular movement. It was widely felt to be a time of living a utopia, when a significant part of the population was involved in the process of the construction of a new society, democratic and socialist (Mogarro & Pintassilgo, 2009).

The popular movements emerged to fill the political vacuum left by the downfall of the New State (*Estado Novo*) regime (Chilcote, 2010) and developed as alternatives to traditional institutions. They emphasised political rights, social justice, and the creation of a democratic space in civil society where competing demands could be openly debated rather than decided behind closed doors, and contributed, according to Marie (2017), to the solution of real problems of everyday life (e.g. housing, childcare, and education).

These revolutionary processes were far from being ideologically homogeneous. Competing political parties, international actors, and segments of the Portuguese population sought to impose their own visions for the future, attempting to shape the direction of the state and the economy (Downs, 1989).

This ideological fragmentation led to two key turning points in 1975 that would ultimately define the trajectory of the Portuguese Revolution. On March 11, a failed right-wing military coup led by General António de Spínola attempted to halt the revolutionary momentum and restore conservative control (Downs, 1989). The coup was swiftly suppressed by progressive factions within the Armed Forces Movement (*Movimento das Forças Armadas* – MFA), and its failure emboldened the revolutionary left. A wave of nationalisations, including banks, insurance firms, the steel monopoly, energy and oil interests, and transportation services, swept the country, land occupations expanded under agrarian reform, and political power increasingly shifted toward grassroots popular movements and leftist elements within the military (Chilcote, 2010; Downs, 1989; Hammond, 1988).

As the revolutionary fervour intensified, so too did internal divisions. The State transformed into a contested terrain marked by multiple social and political struggles, without any social, political, or economic bloc gaining control over it. The attempt to align the State with the proposals of the popular social movement seems to have been at the origin, at least in some sectors, of a 'dual State' (de Sousa Santos, 1990). This concept refers to the paralysis of the state apparatus on the one hand, which did not collapse with the revolution, and the emergence of new institutions on the other hand, which created opportunities for social, political and cultural experimentation (de Sousa Santos, 1990).

By November 25, tensions between military factions reached a boiling point. On one side, there were those grounded in revolutionary legitimacy, seeking to deepen the revolution's transformative goals; on the other, those aligned with electoral legitimacy**,** committed to a transition toward representative democracy. A group of paratroopers,

acting in defence of what they perceived as the revolution's true path, attempted to seize control of strategic military sites in Lisbon, fearing that the process was being co-opted. Their actions were met with swift resistance from forces backing electoral legitimacy. The insurrection was suppressed and military command was restructured to curtail the influence of revolutionary elements, 'leaving the popular movement demoralized and disoriented' (Hammond, 1988, p. 19). The defeat of the military factions grounded in revolutionary legitimacy on November 25 marked the end of the PREC's most transformative phase. It signalled the military's withdrawal from direct political influence, the establishment of a parliamentary democracy, and the transfer of power from the people to a new segment of the capitalist class – in sum, the defeat of the revolution (Hammond, 1988).

However, one element remained constant: the strategic importance attributed to education, particularly popular education, essential to the revolutionary project. Many believed that the political revolution ought to be accompanied by a cultural revolution that would enable a transformation of mentalities and the construction of a *new man*[2] (Pintassilgo, 2014). Therefore, knowledge was positioned as fundamental for the exercise of civic freedom and civic participation in the construction of the new society.

The importance attributed to education began to emerge in the 1960s and intensified in the 1970s, particularly with the Veiga Simão Reform. This comprehensive educational reform sought to democratise education. Its main objectives were to ensure universal access to schooling for all children and to promote equality of opportunity. Launched in January 1971 the reform project sparked widespread public debate, thereby contributing to a broader societal discussion on education in Portugal (Correia, 2000; Stoer, 2008).

The principles of democratisation and equal opportunities, central to the Veiga Simão Reform and requiring the abandonment of the compartmentalised policies that had prevailed until then, can be seen as a reflection of broader transformations of Portuguese educational field. These included the growing association between investment in education and economic development, as well as the increasing influence of the OECD in shaping Portuguese educational policies from the 1960s onwards (Lima, 2024; Stoer, 2008; Teodoro, 2001). At the same time, as Teodoro (2024) notes, the reform represented the most visible expression of the regime's willingness to modernise, a stance clearly reflected in the debates in the National Assembly prior to the act's approval, which were marked by the distrust of conservative sectors. This distrust, however, was not limited to regime supporters: it also extended to the opposition, who considered the reform's principles irreconcilable with the authoritarian nature of the regime (Lima, 2024). Approved on July 25, 1973, the reform was suspended a few months later following the Revolution. Nevertheless, as Lima (2024) points out, several measures related to the democratisation of education – such as vocational education, teacher training, and adult education – were subsequently implemented.

The events of March 1975 required the education sector to intensify its contribution to the construction of a socialist society (Grácio, 1981) through the participation and organisation of the popular masses. The democratisation of access and equality of opportunities became the primary task of educational policy (Teodoro, 2001). A democratising and critical ideology took shape, grounded in a political definition of education that aimed to address educational issues through its contribution to democracy. Education was seen as inseparable from the emergence of politics within the educational space. Efforts were made to blur the boundaries between training for work and for citizenship. The only criterion for defining educational justice was equality of opportunities (Correia, 2000).

In line with the political definition of education (Correia, 2000), Freire's (1997) view of learning as a social practice based on critical dialogue influenced some of the popular education experiments that we will analyse next, such as agrarian reform and the MFA cultural campaigns. The processes of 'conscientização', through which individuals become aware of and problematise their own reality and are empowered to transform it, were central during the PREC. The MFA campaigns employed a range of non-formal educational practices, including theatre, film screenings, lectures, technical workshops (in areas such as medicine, veterinary care, and infrastructure improvement) and political literacy actions. These social practices combined the dissemination of public policies, such as agrarian reform, with practical training. This created learning opportunities centred on local problem-solving and collective decision-making (de Almeida, 2007).

These popular educational initiatives created informal learning spaces where technical knowledge (e.g., agricultural techniques) was combined with civic knowledge (e.g., discussions about self-management and cooperativism). Consequently, the implementation of agrarian reform – specifically the establishment of cooperatives and experiments in self-management – took place within an educational context. Thus, the practices of self-management and collective labour functioned as both a curriculum and a learning laboratory (Almeida, 2009).

This article seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the social, educational and participatory practices during the revolutionary period in Portugal. By focusing on the PREC as a unique historical moment that combined political rupture with grassroots mobilisation, our main aim is to examine how education and participation were mobilised as instruments for societal transformation. To reach this aim we analyse four initiatives that reflect the revolutionary aspirations of the time: two broad-based, civil society led processes, agrarian reform and popular education, and two more structured and state-supported interventions, the Cultural Dynamization and Civic Action Campaign (*Campanha de Dinamização Cultural e Ação Cívica*) by the MFA and the Student Civic Service (*Serviço Cívico Estudantil*). The sources used for analysing these initiatives were primarily documentary (e.g., the Armed Forces Bulletin official reports of the Student Civic Service), complemented by an analysis of academic literature produced about this particular period. The article is structured into four main sections, each devoted to the description and analysis of these initiatives. In the final section (Discussion and Conclusion), we will consider those four experiences in light of the theories and practices of popular education in revolutionary settings, linking them to social change and social transformation.

Social movements for transformation in the revolutionary period

Agrarian reform

Prior to 1974, Portugal's agricultural sector lagged far behind those of most other European countries. It suffered from various inefficiencies and stark inequalities. In southern regions (especially Alentejo), latifundia occupied most of the arable land. Just 2% of farms controlled 57% of cultivated land in the south of the country (Piçarra, 2021). These properties were often underused and relied on seasonal labourers who experienced precarious conditions and limited rights (Varela & Piçarra, 2016).

The agrarian reform that followed the 25 April Revolution was a radical attempt to restructure land ownership and rural production. The movement combined rural workers' occupations from the bottom up and the provisional revolutionary government's

legislation from the top down (Rutledge, 1977). Spontaneous land occupations began in late 1974 and escalated in 1975. Many of these occupations occurred without a national legal framework and were often encouraged by local revolutionary committees and elements of the military. Examples of these include the occupations in Setúbal, Cujancas and Cabeção (Barreto, 1983). However, the most famous and politically significant of these occupations occurred when landless workers occupied the latifundium Torre Bela (owned by a Portuguese aristocrat) to create a cooperative.

By mid-1975, rural workers had occupied over one million hectares, affecting approximately 1,500 landowners (Barreto, 1983). These occupations were formalised by Decree-Law 406-A/75, which permitted the expropriation of underutilised or absentee-owned land. Decree-Law 406-B/75 then established the framework for Collective Production Units (UCPs), which became central to the reform (de Almeida, 2004). Rather than distributing plots to individuals, the Portuguese reform emphasised collective farming. Over 500 UCPs and cooperatives were formed, encompassing around 50,000 workers and covering vast areas of formerly private estates (Fonseca, 2024). These units aimed to improve productivity and employment, as well as fostering democratic participation and egalitarian management (De Carli, 2014; Fernandes, 2013). However, many of these initiatives were plagued by problems such as a lack of technical know-how, political infighting and inadequate support (Clark & O'Neill, 2024).

The reform process was deeply political. Although many occupations were indeed spontaneous, political parties soon recognised their importance. Not only did these parties support the occupants and cooperatives, they also promoted and organised them, and even directed them (Varela & Piçarra, 2016). The Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) was its firmest supporter, whereas the Socialist Party (PS) and the Popular Democratic Party (PPD) became increasingly reserved. This ideological clash was reflected in legislative disputes. The 1976 *Agrarian Reform Pact* represented an attempt to reconcile these differences by limiting expropriations and promoting private agriculture alongside collectives (de Almeida, 2013; Piçarra, 2021).

Following the coup on 25 November 1975, a conservative political tide took hold. Law 77/77, also known as the Law Barreto (*Lei Barreto*), allowed many landowners to reclaim their properties. Subsequent governments restricted new occupations and reduced support for UCPs. The country's access to the European Economic Community in 1986 signalled a decisive move towards private agriculture and market liberalisation, making collective structures increasingly impractical (Fonseca, 2024).

Despite its decline, the reform had a lasting impact. It disrupted feudal power structures and empowered thousands of rural workers. In municipalities such as Avis, former labourers took control of cooperatives, unions and local governments (de Almeida, 2004). However, many participants later expressed disillusionment. In hindsight, the reform is viewed as both a moment of liberation and a source of unresolved trauma (Almeida, 2007; Varela & Piçarra, 2016). Portugal's agrarian reform was an experiment in radical land redistribution, shaped by revolutionary zeal, political idealism and mass mobilisation. Although it was ultimately curtailed, it remains a symbol of rural empowerment and a vivid reminder of how the state and society can engage in transformative action. Its mixed legacy, marked by both achievement and frustration, continues to echo throughout Portugal.

Workers' struggles and popular adult education

Although the MFA initiated the transition from dictatorship, it was the collaboration between the military and civilian sectors that determined the course of the Portuguese

democratic process. Workers' popular struggles, characterised by factory occupations, the formation of workers' councils and widespread demands for economic democracy, occurred in dynamic interaction with the MFA's political project (Maxwell, 1995; Rezola, 2024). While the MFA was not a homogeneous body, it shared an anti-authoritarian ethos and, crucially, created a permissive space for civil society to organise autonomously. The military's refusal to suppress demonstrations, strikes and occupations enabled widespread grassroots mobilisation, particularly within the working class (Chilcote, 2010).

Workers across Portugal began to organise into workers' councils[3] (*comissões de trabalhadores*), taking control of their workplaces and challenging managerial authority. These councils mostly formed spontaneously, assuming responsibility for production decisions and the negotiation of labour conditions. In some cases, they even took over the overall management of factories (Hammond, 1988; Robinson, 1990). The MFA's provisional government recognised many of these councils and engaged with them in consultations, thus legitimising a form of participatory democracy. The Council of the Revolution (*Conselho da Revolução*), established by the MFA in 1975, included representatives from the workers' commissions and trade unions. This recognition marked a unique moment in which military and working-class organisations shared in the construction of political power (Varela, 2012).

Workers' movements campaigned for improved labour conditions and a broader restructuring of economic life. The demand for industrial democracy resulted in co-management arrangements and, crucially, the nationalisation of key sectors, including banking, transport, energy and heavy industry. In response to popular pressure and fears of capital flight, the MFA oversaw the nationalisation wave beginning in March 1975 (Hammond, 1988). But the MFA acted as both a catalyst and a moderator, supporting popular initiatives while attempting to maintain institutional cohesion (Cerezales, 2003).

The PREC was marked by intense social conflict, much of which was fuelled by class tensions and competing ideas about democracy. Workers staged hundreds of strikes, occupied factories and took control of production[4]. Only in the first month after the 25th of April there were 158 conflicts, with strikes or menaces of strikes (Canário, 2008). Varela and Alcântara (2014) reports that in the six months following the revolution, over 1,000 labour disputes occurred, many of which were led by independent workers' commissions. The MFA's response to these struggles was nuanced. While it tolerated and sometimes facilitated workers' occupations, it also sought to contain anarchic tendencies and avoid destabilisation. This balancing act was evident during the coup on 11 March 1975. The coup attempt galvanised the revolutionary left, prompting mass mobilisations and leading the MFA to align more explicitly with the workers' movement. The subsequent period, sometimes referred to as the hot summer (*Verão Quente*) of 1975, saw the peak of revolutionary activity, including large-scale occupations, street assemblies and increased nationalisations (Rezola, 2024; de Sousa Santos, 1985).

During this period, political parties, particularly the PCP and the PS, played dual roles, facilitating and constraining grassroots activism. While the PCP supported the formation of workers' councils, it aimed to centralise their activities within a broader party-led strategy. Wary of leftist radicalism, the PS sought to channel the revolution into parliamentary forms (Maxwell, 1995). The MFA, through the Council of the Revolution and other bodies, attempted to mediate between these forces. In doing so, it often found itself torn between institutional stability and popular radicalism. This dual role, balancing grassroots demands with national governance, helped to preserve the democratic trajectory of the revolution, albeit at the expense of deeper socialist transformations (Chilcote, 2010).

The collaboration between the MFA and civil society transcended the workplace. In urban areas on the outskirts of cities, neighbourhood movements organised around housing rights, sanitation, and infrastructure. Residents' commissions occupied empty housing, demanded rent reductions and planned urban improvements, emphasising participatory decision-making and collective action (Canário, 2014).

The original adult education initiatives of the 1974–76 period emerged in this environment of workers' struggles and everyday conflicts between different revolutionary strategies. There were attempts to build a participatory democracy, but above all there was a widespread enthusiasm and sense of urgency to destroy all signs of the dictatorship and build a new, free country. In other words, people felt it was necessary to abandon the old educational structures and reshape the entire educational system (Teodoro, 1978). During this revolutionary process, the popular classes took over the democratisation of education (Stoer, 1982).

The PREC brought about a complete change to the former landscape of adult education. The dictatorship regime limited adult education to timid literacy campaigns in the 1950s and '60s which served more as mechanisms of ideological control than tools for empowerment (Stoer & Dale, 1987). The basic idea that guided adult education after the revolution was to transform the usual relationship between the state and its citizens, turning it upside down. From then on, the administration would support the hundreds of groups already engaged in diverse popular actions, serving the grassroots movements. Adult education was intended to emerge spontaneously from grassroots initiatives, often in response to immediate social needs, and guided by local self-determination. It was perhaps possible for a system of adult education to evolve in this way (Melo & Benavente, 1978).

The Directorate-General for Permanent Education (DGEP) was a state agency that had existed since 1973. Following the revolution, Alberto Melo took charge of the agency, which was staffed by educators who shared radical pedagogical ideals. The DGEP created the legal status of *popular education association* and a simplified process for the legal registration of grassroots groups. This legal instrument provided informal groups with a fast-track procedure to become officially recognised, which granted these associations access to public funding and technical support, and legitimacy in their interactions with local authorities and communities. In short, the law was a cornerstone of the democratisation of adult education (Melo & Benavente, 1978).

Popular education associations were involved in a variety of activities during this period, ranging from literacy, or vocational training, to theatre, oral history and political education. They deployed culture as a central element in their action Such initiatives employed participatory methods such as group discussions, photo narratives, and local storytelling, focusing on themes such as land ownership and class struggle. These methods were inspired by Freire's philosophy (1965, 1997), not just in literacy work. The educational process began with the realities experienced by learners and unfolded through dialogue, reflection, and action. The aim was not merely to teach people to read and write, but also to enable them to critically analyse their social conditions and organise collectively for change.

The DGEP supported the popular education associations providing bursaries for people in local communities to develop diverse activities or offering technical support. The DGEP also built mobile units that travelled the country to connect with, and support, these associations (Melo & Benavente, 1978). According to the same authors, these local nuclei gradually evolved into a system capable of articulating with professional training, formal schooling and civic participation. Popular adult education was literally co-produced by communities and culture was an important dimension of its action.

In July 1976, around 500 popular education associations were in close contact with the DGEP. It is also important to note that many other informal groups were active at this time. Norbeck (1983) estimates that 700 popular education associations were operating within a variety of themes, ranging from literacy to community-based work in collaboration with social services and training organisations.

The importance of this work lies in the fact that these local group-based dynamics represented a process of liberation that fostered autonomy rather than dependency in the population (Melo & Benavente, 1978). It would transform adult education into a platform for participatory democracy.

It seemed that the hope of establishing a grassroots system of adult education inspired by popular education was about to become a reality. However, history took a different turn. The events of 25 November 1975 marked the end of the revolutionary period and signalled the beginning of the establishment of representative democracy, as defended by most political parties. The first free elections in 1975, with a turnout of over 90%, elected a Constituent Assembly responsible for drafting and approving a new constitution. This paved the way to the reconstruction of a capitalist state, and the first constitutional government marked the end of the period of radical educational reforms (Stoer & Dale, 1999), resulting in a rapid cut in revolutionary policies. Those associated with popular education were dismissed and the DGEP was left without qualified personnel, resulting in popular education being marginalised (Silva, 1990). All its activities came to a standstill a couple of years later (M. J. Gonçalves, 1978). It became clear that popular education would not be the foundation of the Portuguese adult education system, despite what some had hoped.

The 'Cultural Dynamization and Civic Action Campaign' by the MFA

One of the defining traits of the Portuguese revolutionary process was the belief that political change could not be separated from cultural transformation (Pintassilgo, 2014). The *Cultural Dynamization and Civic Action Campaign*, organised by MFA, embodied this principle. Designed to bring the revolution to rural areas and foster civic and political awareness, the campaign represented a key step in aligning cultural work with broader goals of social justice and participatory democracy (Stoer, 1986). It took place between October 1974 and February 1975, with some local extensions continuing until August of that year (Almeida, 2008).

According to Almeida (2008), the campaign must be understood in the context of the MFA Programme. As Prime Minister Vasco Gonçalves noted in an interview, the military were already experienced in this type of engagement during the colonial war. These campaigns aimed to gain the trust of local populations and were now redirected to serve the Portuguese people:

> The military were used to working, during the war, on psychosocial campaigns aimed at winning over the local populations. We thought it would be easier in Portugal. I remember Salgueiro Maia saying: 'Give me bricks and the necessary materials, and we'll go work in the villages'. (Teodoro, 2002, p. 133)

The campaign had both political and cultural objectives. On the political front, it sought to stimulate participation by disseminating the MFA's programme and encouraging public debate about the country's future. Culturally, it aimed to support the creation of a national cultural network in collaboration with cultural associations and state institutions, contributing to cultural decentralisation and promoting access to culture outside urban

centres (Almeida, 2008). Its overarching goal was to foster civic engagement and support the construction of a democratic society (Dinamização Cultural, 1974).

As Pintassilgo (2014) argues, the campaign exemplified the deep interconnection between cultural and political revolution This vision is powerfully expressed in an editorial from the MFA Bulletin:

> The regime established in 1926 closed schools and reduced the length of schooling. A rise in the cultural level of the population would inevitably imply change, and that was not what was intended. But it was impossible to keep a country in obscurantism indefinitely, and that is why April 25th happened: the victory of an entire people who truly wanted change. However, this was only the first battle – and perhaps even the easiest. Many more will have to be fought before we reach the goal we have set ourselves: the establishment of democracy in Portugal. And that means that we must all take part in the battle for awareness and information. Culture cannot be imposed: culture is born from the people. It is in the daily struggle that culture is created. Bringing to the people what belongs to the people is the task we now undertake with the launch of the Campaign for Cultural Dynamisation. (Editorial, 1974, p. 1)

The campaign focused primarily on rural and inland regions of northern and central Portugal. It followed an itinerant model, combining 'clarification sessions[5]' with cultural activities – including film screenings, theatre performances, and concerts[6] – used as platforms to initiate political discussions (Oliveira, 2004; Almeida, 2008). These events were complemented by local development projects, led primarily by military personnel and occasionally supported by intellectuals, artists, and cultural or technical collectives who viewed the campaign as an opportunity to continue their work (Almeida, 2008).

The campaign's inspiration in the Cuban post-revolutionary literacy movement complicated its adaptation to the Portuguese context. From the outset, two mobilising currents coexisted within the campaign: the 'literacy' current and the 'popular power' current. These perspectives were never fully integrated due to the campaign's early termination. The political takeover by parties and the subsequent loss of influence by the MFA marked the end of the revolutionary mobilisation process, of which the cessation of the *Cultural Dynamization Campaign* was only one expression (Stoer, 1986).

Student Civic Service

The inability to hold final examinations in the 1973/74 academic year, due to the revolution, led to the automatic admission of students who had completed secondary education into universities. As a result, the 1974/75 cohort included far more students than the universities were prepared to accommodate.

> All of a sudden, around 25,000 students appeared (their exact number was never known…) applying for higher education. At the same time, the universities were severely weakened by the removal of some of their best professors. Moreover, the long-standing 'school explosion' had already made the facilities of these institutions increasingly inadequate. (Gomes, 1976, p. 280)

In response to this crisis, the government decided to suspend new admissions to higher education institutions (Maxwell, 1995). This raised an urgent question: what should be done with the thousands of young people who no longer had access to university (Oliveira, 2004)?

As a temporary solution, the Student Civic Service was established through Decree-Law no. 123/75, issued on May 30, 1975, after an extensive and prolonged debate within

the Council of Ministers. Aimed at students who had completed secondary education the previous year, it instituted a 'zero year' before university entry. This initiative emerged alongside other popular education programs, such as the *Cultural Dynamization and Civic Action Campaign*.

In addition to addressing the higher education crisis, the *Student Civic Service* sought to promote closer links between intellectual and manual labour, break the isolation of schools from real life, support the development of social infrastructures, and improve living conditions in local communities (Introdução, n.d.). It challenged the usual separation between school and society, as it is clear from the Student Civic Service Information Bulletin:

> Our objective is to efficiently and meaningfully launch a Student Civic Service that will, on the one hand, enable students to actively and genuinely engage with the environment in which they live – with the culture of our People, the culture of the Neighbourhood, the Factory, and the Countryside; and, on the other hand, allow students to gain a deep understanding of the social problems of the country in which they live. In short, it aims to allow students to enrich themselves through participation in, and transformation of, society in practice. (Introdução, n.d., p. 1)

Data from the 1975/76 academic year offer valuable insight on some results (Serviço Cívico Estudantil, 1976). A total of approximately 12,000 students were engaged in a wide range of community-based initiatives aimed at social transformation and civic participation. Activities included health education (2,500 students), social security support (2,000), and complementary educational initiatives such as managing school libraries and organising leisure activities for youth (2,400). Significant numbers also participated in sports-based community engagement (1,400) and cultural activities (1,500), reflecting a broad understanding of education as a cultural and social process. Other efforts focused on literacy campaigns (759), work in agriculture, forestry, and livestock, including fire prevention and vaccination campaigns (400), and support for agricultural cooperatives and collective production units, where tasks often integrated literacy, health education, and children's recreational activities (150). Additionally, 900 students took part in miscellaneous actions, such as public health surveys, hygienic-sanitary campaigns, and audio-visual equipment inventories. These figures show the multidimensional nature of the Student Civic Service and its commitment to linking education with practical, socially relevant engagement.

However, the program was not without controversy. It faced criticism from various sectors of Portuguese society. Vitorino Magalhães Godinho, who served as Minister of Education from July to November 1974, summarised some of the criticisms that argued that the *Student Civic Service* would demobilise the youth, distancing them from schools. It was seen as a disguised way of accessing cheap labour, exacerbating the growing unemployment in Portugal, delaying the training of the technicians and scientists the country so desperately needed, and maintaining an elitist university system reserved for only a few (Teodoro, 2002). On June 17, 1977, the *Student Civic Service* came to an end, being replaced by a foundation year (*Ano Propedêutico*) at the end of secondary school.

With the dismantling of the *Student Civic Service*, it was abandoned the revolutionary ideal of a 'school without walls', deeply embedded in and responsive to society. What followed was a reassertion of traditional educational boundaries, disconnecting the students from the lived realities and struggles of the Portuguese people.

Discussion

The concept and social practices of popular education are undoubtedly polysemic. Not only are they very old – one could argue that Condorcet was one of its promoters (Cáceres, 1964) – but they were also influenced by the different geographies in which they emerged, along with the various socio-political conditions that gave them their distinctive features. Traditional definitions can work well only to begin this discussion, such as the one by Guereña et al. (1994): a set of processes aimed at educating the popular or dominated classes developed outside or in parallel with school processes. However, the analysis provided by historical revisions reveals wider possibilities. In one such revision, Tiana Ferrer (2011) argues that popular education is not related to the different purposes of education (such as instruction, self-education or ideological or political commitment) nor to the level or age of the people involved, but rather to their social origins and position. From this perspective, popular education focuses on educational activities for or by the lower classes of society, considering their participation to be the defining feature of such activities.

Accordingly, some of the initiatives we analysed, such as the MFA campaigns and the students' civic service, can clearly be labelled as popular education. However, the remaining examples we presented, such as the popular education of the DGEP, workers' struggles and agrarian reform, are more specifically directed towards social transformation, apart from the positionality of the participants. They aimed to effect deep and wide-reaching social change. The majority of popular education concepts and practices do work in traditional spaces and times. However, an analysis of PREC can only be effective when considering similar revolutionary contexts, such as those in Latin America. Kane (2010) argues that popular education in Latin America has evolved through close dialogue with grassroots social movements, drawing on the work of Freire (1997) and embodying the core values of critical consciousness, collective empowerment and praxis. Its educational principles extend beyond the mere acquisition of literacy and skills in contexts characterised by political agency, democratic participation and social transformation.

Thus, we are presenting the Portuguese case as an example of popular education in line with traditions where education is integrated with political empowerment, collective learning and action in large-scale political contexts, as demonstrated by Kane (2010). In this sense, we consider all the experiences described and analysed above to be about popular education and popular struggles aimed at achieving two main things: destroying the structures and processes of the dictatorship regime and rebuilding a free and democratic country. The strong social popular movements that emerged after the 25th April coup d'état were, as argued by Canário (2008), both the cause and effect of a temporary suspension of the power exercised by employers and the repressive power of the state, thanks to the neutralisation of the political police and militarised forces and the fragmentation of military power – and, we add, also thanks to be the role of the MFA.

This primarily allowed the 2 years that the PREC lasted to be maybe the freest period of recent Portuguese history (Canário, 2014), in which huge numbers of people aggregated and collectively acted in a number of different stages to force deep transformation. These actions and experiences were no unified as the revolution lacked *one* direction. This made of PREC a battlefield between different revolutionary strategies, so much as a battlefield to eliminate the dictatorship from the collective life. In this context the PREC was an important counter-hegemonic period, in which counter-hegemonic practices emerged.

For Peter Mayo (1999, 2015), counter-hegemony is understood within Antonio Gramsci's framework of cultural hegemony, where dominant groups secure consent through coercion, but also by shaping common sense, values, and worldviews. Counter-hegemony, then, is the process of constructing alternative forms of knowledge, culture, and practice that contest this dominant worldview and open spaces for emancipatory social transformation (Mayo, 1999). In a critical pedagogy perspective, counter-hegemonic practices emerge through education and collective struggle. Adult education, popular education, and community learning (all of which appeared above in our text) become ideal terrains for counter-hegemony because they empower people to question dominant ideologies and imagine alternative futures – and this is in our opinion the primary essence of PREC. Additionally all the grassroots movements that we described often act as 'organic intellectuals' in Gramsci's sense, generating knowledge from below and challenging hegemony (Mayo, 2015). People generated new knowledge when they imagined adult education as being built from the hundreds of groups that were involved in it. They also generated new knowledge when they joined commissions that dismissed the management bodies of hundreds of enterprises and demanded fairer labour conditions. They generated new knowledge, too, when they set up hundreds of cooperatives (under the agrarian reform movements or outside them) and institutions, and when they self-managed them.

There are multiple reasons why the work of Paulo Freire is important to the discussion of our article, not least because of his radical stance on popular education within social movements, a stance he maintained throughout his life and work. First, Freire (1997) showed clearly that education *is* a political act. We believe we have shown the deep political commitment and the political struggles that went on during the PREC. Second, Freire (1997) believed in people's emancipation by liberating themselves and their oppressors and also believing that liberating education could be crucial in driving social transformation dynamics. Key in this issue is that ownership of the pedagogy of the oppressed belongs to the people and not to educators. And in fact, our text shows that popular classes were in the centre of the experiences we analysed.

Finally, Freire gave centrality to class and class struggle (Crowther & Martin, 2018) as he was aware of the connections between social class and structural factors. Class struggle was indeed key and clear during PREC as the enemies of the 'working masses' was well identified: the bourgeoisie, the employers, the capitalists. These were confronted because they were clearly identified with the dictatorship regime and its power structure. In Freirean terms, this involved rejecting authoritarian approaches and creating new spaces and processes in which the oppressors could become cocreators in the liberation processes (Freire, 1997).

'Pedagogy in process' was a construction deeply embedded in Freire's thinking. Although he did not use the exact term in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire employed it later in *Pedagogy of Hope*. In both texts (Freire, 1992, 1997), he described and analysed a pedagogy that is always in motion, dialogical, unfinished, and co-constructed, both in historical practice and social transformation. This is a process of liberation that is built with the oppressed and emerges from their struggles, developing as a praxis. Therefore, when analysed globally, the PREC period was a Freirian pedagogy in process that educates towards liberation.

There is no doubt that Freire turned out to be central after the Portuguese revolution. He inspired many Portuguese educators following the 25th of April 1974, a 'period of popular education, greatly influenced by the ideas and practices of Paulo Freire' (Canário, 2013, pp. 56-57). The training of adult educators focused on Paulo Freire, and his importance has endured over the decades, although the reasons for this may have changed.

It is important to discuss particular aspects of the experiences we described earlier. We already showed that the agrarian reform was an experiment in radical land redistribution supported by a strong mass mobilisation. As other forms of social participation during PREC, it was a vivid combat contested by many and supported by others – a typical counter-hegemonic, radical practice. Even if it proved impossible to maintain under neoliberal times that elected private sectors as dominant, it shows that state and society *can* engage into transformation action (Varela & Piçarra, 2016). As to the popular struggles in the context of the work world, they have originated new power relations inside enterprises, and new autonomous bodies of workers whom, on some cases, will lead production processes in a self-management regime (Canário, 2008). As this author further argues, worker's commissions led occupation processes that challenged the prevailing principles of both property ownership and traditional institutional power (the Church, Army, etc.). Numerous companies came under the direct control of elected committees, within a framework of workers' direct democracy. Our article shows a struggle for social transformation that represents an intense process of collective learning. It also 'helps to dispel the illusion that social emancipation can be ensured by educational policies and practices originating in the sphere of the State' (Canário, 2008, p. 34).

The Cultural Dynamization Campaign, organised by the MFA and the Students' Civic Service, shared socialist values and committed to grassroots political and cultural transformation (Oliveira, 2004). Both had a non-formal and informal educational focus within the context of public service. It is adequate to reflect on the meaning of campaign, which was particularly visible in the MFA experience. Literacy campaigns, particularly in revolutionary contexts, have often been framed as emancipatory projects aimed at eradicating illiteracy and fostering popular participation. Yet Paulo Freire warn against the limitations of the very notion of campaigns. He criticised educational practices that operate as one-way 'extensions' of knowledge, arguing that such initiatives often become forms of 'cultural invasion'. Extension presupposes that the technicians extend their knowledge to those considered ignorant, whereas genuine education must be dialogical, based on communication and co-creation of meaning (Freire, 1985). Campaigns risk reproducing this model, treating learners as passive recipients rather than subjects of their own liberation. As mentioned previously, the MFA was criticised for its cultural campaign, despite the intention being to encourage open discussion with the people. However, these reflections on campaigns were also important within the DGEP, which in an initial phase and after collective reflection, dismissed the idea of promoting campaigns during the PREC.

Conclusion

In this conclusion, it is important to address a central question: what changes did the PREC bring to Portuguese society? The period in question was so rich and complex that our article only covers a very small part of it, so we can only provide partial answers to this question.

Firstly, during this period, Portugal witnessed what Stoer (1986) termed the 'renaissance of civil society', characterised by the growth and renewal of civil society institutions. Examples include neighbourhood commissions, free press, professional associations, workers' councils, parents' associations and trade unions. Given that the dictatorship lasted for 48 years, this was a significant transformation. Moreover, this happened spontaneously through the actions of the people, including those involved in popular education, and it was a crucial legacy for the future of Portuguese society.

Secondly, it has been observed in other revolutionary processes that discourses around democratisation often lead to the depoliticisation of education. However, Correia (2000) notes that in Portugal, framing educational issues around democratisation actually intensified their politicisation. During the revolutionary period, education was configured and assumed as a political act and this allowed the reborning of education in Portugal. Popular education initiatives inspired or aligned with Paulo Freire thought and framed by broader cultural and political objectives became an important contribution to democracy. These initiatives aimed to foster critical consciousness and civic engagement, thereby contributing to the construction of a new society.

Thirdly, the revolutionary process in Portugal was very broad and cannot be analysed using concepts of popular education that are much more tailored to institutionalised and stable settings. The Portuguese case aligns with broader movements that emerged following decolonisation and democratisation, particularly in Latin America, where popular education was employed to promote liberation theology, land reform, and participatory governance (Torres, 1990). Popular education during the PREC was made of a diverse set of collective actions (many of them spontaneous) leaded by the working class, closely tied to clear aims of social change processes. In this sense, education and popular education contributed deeply to the transformation of Portuguese society. The PREC can be seen as a 'pedagogy in process', in which the oppressed liberated from a long-lasting period of oppression in which they were voiceless.

Fourthly, the revolutionary processes represented a unique form of democratisation. Many people contributed to establishing democracy in Portugal. However, the contribution of popular education processes, experiences and working-class struggles cannot be erased from history. The fact that popular education gradually moved to the margins after 1976 does not diminish its value. Furthermore, popular education did not disappear. It simply transformed into something else, though this development cannot be analysed in this text.

In conclusion, we are certain that the PREC was a crucial source of transformation for our country, which remains understudied. Perhaps this article will encourage other researchers to delve deeper into the subject.

Notes

1 This statement was made by the Prime Minister of the 2nd Provisional Government, Coronel Vasco Gonçalves, in his inaugural speech on July 18, 1974 (V. Gonçalves, 1974).

2 As in the original.

3 Workers' councils still exist today. Elected by workers in a specific enterprise, institution or organisation, they have a wide range of legally recognised rights and function as a direct means of negotiating with employers. For example, workers' councils have the right to demand all types of management and organisational data from employers, and they have the right to hold a monthly meeting with them. This explains why they are so popular in Portugal today.

4 The number of daily events during the PREC period was amazingly high. The historic chronology of that period is an extensive one. As an example, it follows some events of one single day, the 6th of May 1974, only two weeks after the April 25 coup (Rodrigues, 1994): 'A communiqué from the Junta condemns meetings in companies during working hours, the expulsion of people with official responsibilities and attacks on the hierarchy. In a statement, the PCP defends its entry into the Provisional Government, alongside other democratic forces. It calls for the people to unite with the MFA, condemns right-wing opportunism and left-wing adventurism, and the occupations of parish councils and town halls. An MRPP demonstration brings together 500 people in Lisbon. At TAP, a general assembly of workers nominates three of their delegates to sit on the company's Board of Directors with three others nominated by the Junta and demands the opening of a process leading to self-management. General assembly of metalworkers in Porto and Matosinhos. Steelworkers threaten to strike; management and employees offer to act as intermediaries with Champalimaud.

Start of the struggle at Timex and election of the workers' committee. General assemblies of miners, hospital workers in Coimbra, radio and television workers in Porto, gas and electricity workers in Porto, TLP workers in Lisbon and Bragança, etc. Fishermen in Matosinhos return to the sea after four days on strike. Assembly of 3,000 railway workers decides to dismiss the management and demand the removal of those connected to the dictatorship regime'.

5 There is no good translation of the Portuguese expression *sessões de esclarecimento* into English. These are sessions where a particular topic is discussed and clarified – more than just an information session. This means that everyone can ask questions and contribute to reach a common understanding of the theme.

6 Many artists were persecuted and exiled during the dictatorship. The contributions of artists and artistic movements to the PREC were so significant that they could fill several articles themselves. This is particularly evident in music. Musicians and composers such as Zeca Afonso, José Mário Branco, Sérgio Godinho, Fausto, Francisco Fanhais and Adriano Correia de Oliveira used music based on popular culture to create new compositions for the working classes and their struggles. José Mário Branco and others formed the so-called Cultural Action Group, which composed collectively and, during the PREC, performed at strikes, demonstrations, occupations and in factories. The same thing happened in theatre. Companies such as *Comuna* and *Teatro do Mundo* were dedicated to intervention theatre with very similar purposes. Arts and cultural intervention were indeed an important element that made a huge contribution to the revolutionary process.

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